

Respond to the suspicion of hijab and the Clothes of the Muslim Woman



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Hijab

(head cover) and the Clothes
of the Muslim Woman

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1-Hijab in Islam

Many Westerners think that hijab (veil) is the symbol of oppression of the Muslim woman. Several western caricaturists depict the Muslim woman typically as one wearing a black «abaya» : a dress that covers all her body except for her eyes. She is usually fat and sad! The aim behind this is usually to criticize such costume and confirm the image of the oppressed Muslim woman in the western minds! We refuted that image in a previous article «Arabs and Women Slavery» in which we mentioned the reaction of Saudi female students to the comments of Karen Hughes, the Middle East emissary of the American Administration, and how they proved their love of their Islamic costume and hijab. They were proud and had no intention to give this up. However, is hijab an Islamic innovation?

2-Hijab was an Old Jewish Custom

Although Muslim women are the ones that mostly observe the hijab, it is not correct that Islam is the only religion that orders its followers to wear hijab! Laila Lia Bruner, professor of Jewish history at the Jewish University and the visiting professor at Shiva University Institute for Adult Studies indicates that, «the early divine classic literature, Talmud and Midrash, had completely different viewpoints regarding covering woman's hair. At that time, covering hair was not just a costume or a habit as in the Bible. Rather, it was the rule and regulation for pious women. The later divine literature of the middle ages asserted that issue as a complementary part of Jewish religious rituals.» ⁽¹⁾

Hijab, then, was a habit and then a religious obligation on the Jewish woman. The Talmud Encyclopedia asserts this through comparing the opinion of the «mishna», the main source of rabbinic Judaism, and that of the Talmud regarding hijab:

«It seems that the mishna considered covering the hair as a Jewish habit despite that Talmud had already set a Torah rule for that and stated it as an obligation. Moreover, it is interesting that the term «dat yahudit» is used only for the behavior of women so that many defined the term as related to women's modesty in particular.» ⁽²⁾

Whether covering hair was a Jewish habit or a religious obligation, it is an established fact that was known and widespread in old Jewish societies.

In his book The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature, Rabbi Dr.

1 Dr. Leila Leah Bronner, «From veil to wig: Jewish women's hair covering», From: Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought. 91993/22/.

2 Encyclopedia Talmudit [Talmudic Encyclopedia], s.v. «Dat Yehudit», VIII, 19 [Hebrew]; Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Nashim, Hilkhos Ishut 24:12.

Menachem M. Brayer, Professor of Biblical Literature at Yeshiva University, indicates that it was the habit of Jewish women to go in public with the head cover which covered at time the whole face except for one eye. ⁽³⁾ He quotes the words of some old famous Rabbis as saying, «it is not the habit of the girls of Israel to go with bare head», «damned be the man who let his wives hair to be seen ... The woman who keeps her hair bare brings poverty.» The divine law prohibits the recitation of blessings or prayers in the presence of a married woman whose hair is not covered. This is considered as «nakedness»⁽⁴⁾. Professor Brier adds that, «during the period of Tanitic the failure of woman to cover her hair was considered as a humiliation of her modesty. She was fined four hundred «zeuzem» for that (zeuzem was about a quarter of a shekel)». He indicates as well that the hijab of the Jewish woman was not always a sign of modesty; at times it was an indication of distinction and luxury for noble women. It also symbolized the non-attainment of the married woman as being a sacred ownership of her husband. ⁽⁵⁾ Hijab also symbolized self-respect of the woman and he social status. Women of the lower classes used to wear hijab to give the impression that they were of a higher class. Hijab, in fact, was an indication of the noble class and this was the reason prostitutes were prevented from covering their hair in old Jewish society. However, prostitutes often wore a special scarf to look respectable. ⁽⁶⁾

3 Menachem M. Brayer, *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature: A Psychosocial Perspective* (Hoboken, N.J: Ktav Publishing House, 1986) p. 239.

4 Menachem M. Brayer, *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature: A Psychosocial Perspective* (Hoboken, N.J: Ktav Publishing House, 1986), pp. 316317-. Also see Leonard J. Swidler, *Women in Judaism: the Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, N.J: Scarecrow Press, 1976), pp. 121123-.

5 Menachem M. Brayer, *The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature: A Psychosocial Perspective* (Hoboken, N.J: Ktav Publishing House, 1986), p. 139.

6 Susan W. Schneider, *Jewish and Female* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984) p. 237.

3-European Jewish Women wore Hijab until the 19th. Century

European Jewish women continued to wear hijab until the nineteenth century. When their life became more secularized under the influence of their surroundings and modernized European life, they were forced to go out bare headed. Some of them found it easier to wear the wig instead of their traditional hijab to keep their hair covered. However, most devout Jewish women nowadays do not cover their hair except at synagogues (while other sects, such as Haseedem, are still wearing wigs. ⁽⁸⁾)

7 Susan W. Schneider, *Jewish and Female* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), pp. 238239-.

8 Alexandra Wright, «Judaism», in Holm and Bowker, ed., pp. 128129-.

4-Christianity as well believes that Women should wear Hijab

As for Christianity, we should remember Prophet Isa's (Jesus) (PBUH) saying, «Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.» (Matthew 5:17)

As hijab was a habit and religious obligation in Judaism, it is not logical that Prophet Isa came to change it. The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians asserts the necessity of head cover in Christianity as well as follows:

«Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. « (I Corinthians 11: 310-)

If a Woman does not cover her Head, she should have her Hair cut off

In light of the above (the previous part of this article», it was an obligation on the woman rather than the man, as per Christianity, to cover her head; otherwise it must be shaven. The importance of hijab in Christianity can be revealed not only by reviewing this religion in depth but just by looking at nuns at churches. They not only wear hijab but also what seems as full Islamic dress. If hijab had not been that important in Christianity, nuns would not have been obligated to wear it inside and outside churches. Lady Mariam (Mary), the mother of Prophet Isa (Jesus) (peace be upon him), always appears wearing hijab in their drawn pictures. This indicates that hijab is an essential sacred characteristic in Christianity.

Saint Paul indicated that hijab is the symbol of the manly power. He says,

«The man indeed ought not to cover his head: because he is the image and glory of God. But the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man.» (I Corinthians 11:3)

In his famous treatise «On the Veiling of Virgins», Saint Tertullian wrote:

«If on account of men they adopt a false garb, let them carry out that garb fully even for that end; and as they veil their head in presence of heathens, let them at all events in the church conceal their virginity, which they do veil outside the church. They fear strangers: let them stand in awe of the brethren too; or else let them have the consistent

hardihood to appear as virgins in the streets as well, as they have the hardihood to do in the churches. I will praise their vigor, if they succeed in selling aught of virginity among the heathens withal. Identity of nature abroad as at home, identity of custom in the presence of men as of the Lord, consists in identity of liberty.» One of the laws at the Catholic Church is the law that orders women to cover their heads. ⁽⁹⁾

The women of the Amish and the Mennonites, two Christian sects, wear hijab to date. The rationale of their Church leaders is that of Saint Paul in the New Testament, that is, the hijab is the symbol of woman's subjection to both man and Lord. ⁽¹⁰⁾

9 Clara M. Henning, «Cannon Law and the Battle of the Sexes» in Rosemary R. Ruether, ed., Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974) p. 272

10 Donald B. Kraybill, The riddle of the Amish Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) p. 56

5-Hijab is not an Islamic Innovation

Based on the above, it should be clear that hijab was not an Islamic innovation; rather, Islam endorsed it as being a good and beneficiary custom. Allah (the Almighty) says in the Noble Quran what can be translated as, «Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and protect their private parts (from illegal sexual acts, etc.) and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like palms of hands or one eye or both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, etc.), and to draw their veils all over Juyubihinna (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms, etc.)...» (Surat An-Noor 3031-)

The Noble Quran is explicit regarding the objective of wearing hijab. Allah (the Almighty) says what can be translated as, «O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.» (Surat Al-Ahzab 59)

6-The Objective behind Wearing Hijab

The objective behind wearing hijab and the Islamic costume is to protect the Muslim woman from the eyes of the molesters. It is not that it is man's property or subjected to him as in Christianity. It is not also a symbol of luxury and social values as in Judaism. The Noble Quran is very clear in this regard. In light of all this, we can now understand why some Westerners see hijab as a symbol of subjection; they conceive of hijab from their own Christian or Jewish perspectives and not from an Islamic perspective. They do not understand the Islamic objectives behind wearing hijab and the Islamic costume. This is simply for protection; to be modest is a measure for the Muslim woman to protect herself lest she should regret. Islam takes great care to protect both the body and reputation of the woman. Therefore, the one who dares even to accuse woman of being unchaste is severely punished. Allah (the Almighty) says in the Noble Quran what can be translated as, «And those who accuse chaste women, and produce not four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes, and reject their testimony forever, they indeed are the Fasiqun (liars, rebellious, disobedient to Allah).» (Surat An-Noor 4)

However, the attitude of the Old Testament regarding rape is rather lax:

«If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.» (Deuteronomy 22:28-30)

Islam pays more Attention to the Woman's Psyche

The question here is: who has been punished according to the last quotation from the Old Testament? Is it the rapist? Or the poor raped virgin girl who is forced to live with him forever? Which attitude protects woman better? Is it the Quranic attitude that urges her not to show her charms to protect herself from potential attackers? Or is it the attitude of the Old Testament that obliged the victim to spend her entire life with the criminal?

7-Why is the Percentage of Rape and Harassment High in the Societies that Reject Hijab?

However, many Westerners may not be convinced that hijab and Islamic costume can protect woman from harassers and attackers. Instead, they think that the best protection emanates from educational level, civilized behavior and self-control against temptations. Although these are important and beneficial principles, they are not enough. Otherwise, what is the reason for the high rates of rape and sexual harassment in the West? Women's Lobby Organization that deals with women's issues in Europe indicates that 40-50% of European women are harassed at workplace. ⁽¹¹⁾ In America, 31% of working women report the same problem. ⁽¹²⁾ A 2002-year study on the students from the eighth class to the eleventh class in America reported that 83% of female students had been victims of sexual harassments. ⁽¹³⁾

This means that sexual harassment is widespread in the West; it even develops into rape in many cases. High educational level and civilized behavior do not prevent such thing. A UN report gathered from various governmental sources in more than 65 countries revealed that more than 250.000 rape cases, whether committed or not, were reported to police annually. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Moreover, according to Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the largest national organization

11 Taken from womenlobby organization's web site at www.womenlobby.org

12 Taken from sexualharassmentsupport's website , a non profit private venture founded in 2005 by sexual harassment victims for sexual harassment victims. www.Sexualharassmentsupport.org

13 The American Association of University Women (AAUW) www.aauw.org, «Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School (2001)»

14 The Eighth United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (2001/2002-) Table 02.08 Total recorded rapes.

in America against sexual assaults and one of the Worth-rated organizations among the best 100 charities in America: ⁽¹⁵⁾

- In America, a person is sexually assaulted every two minutes and half.
- One of every six American women has been a victim of a sexual attack.
- In 2004-2005, the annual average of rapes, rape attempts or sexual assaults were 200,780 cases.

Rape is a frightening phenomenon in America. Various feminist and governmental organizations try to calculate the number of rapes and provide psychological and medical consultancies for the raped women. The following are some statistics provided by Women's Rape Crisis Center, a specialized entity in this regard: ⁽¹⁶⁾

- 1.3 adult women are raped every minute, that is, 78 every hour and 1,871 every day. (National Center of Victims and National Center of Research and Treating Crime Victims 1992)
- In USA, one rape is reported every five minutes. (FBI: Common Crime Report, 2000)
- Sexual assault is still the most increasing and violent crime in USA. (American Medical Society, 2000)

15 Taken from www.rainn.org

16 Taken from Women's Rape Crisis Center web site at : www.stoprapevermont.org/stats/adult.html

- The USA has the highest rate in sexual assault among industrial countries. (Judicial Committee of the Senate, 1990)
- There were about 51.000 rapes and sexual assaults that took place at workplaces every year from 1992 until 1996. (US Department of Justice, Office of Judicial Statistics, A Survey on Violence Victims at Workplaces)

These frightening figures surely assert that the woman is always a victim of assault and harassment in Western societies where both sexes mingle together. Intellectual and well-qualified women are always the victims in such industrial first-world developed nations. Therefore, we can assume that neither the educational level nor so-called civilized life can prevent woman from being harassed or raped in such overtly mixed societies. We cannot even depend on self-restraint to combat temptations and put an end to the phenomenon of sexual harassment in these mixed societies. If woman herself does not hide her charms in order to raise male instincts, nothing shall be accomplished in this regard. The only way to do this is through wearing hijab and the costumes that cover these charms. Otherwise, she will remain a vulnerable victim subject to destructive results. Such destructive results are mentioned by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as follows: ⁽¹⁷⁾

«Sexual violence can have destructive permanent effects on victims, families and communities such as the following:

Physically:

- Woman who are victims of sexual and bodily exploitation are more vulnerable for sexually-transmitted diseases (Wingood Eight L. 2000)
- There is more than 32.000 pregnancies annually because of rape (Holmes Eight L. 1996)
- There are long-term results such as chronic pelvic pain, pre-menses syndrome, intestinal disorders, recurrent migraine, backache, face ache, and inability to work. (Jeokis, Sheen, Garci Moreno 2002)

Psychologically:

Victims of sexual violence face immediate and long-term psychological effects (Ackard Eight L. 2004; Feleiti Eight L. 1998; Craco Eight L. 2002; Yestigaard Eight L. 2004)

1- Immediate psychological effects include «shock, denial, fear, disruption, anxiety, withdrawal, guilt, nervousness, doubt, and symptoms of post-trauma disturbances such as emotional disruption, sleeping disorders, accident flashbacks, and mental repetition of assault.»

2- Chronic mental-psychological effects include «depression, suicide attempt/ committing suicide, isolation, post-trauma disturbances and unhealthy nutritional behaviors such as fasting, vomiting, misuses of

diet bills, and voracity.»

Socially:

- Disturbed familial relations between the victim and her family, friends and intimate partners.
- Less emotional support from friends and family members.
- Less communication with friends and relatives.
- Lower desire in marriage (Clementis Eight L. 2004; Gholding, Wilsnak, and Copier 2002)

Healthy Behaviors:

Some researchers consider the following healthy behaviors as being effects of sexual violence and factors that may increase the probability of another trauma in the future (Breiner Eight L 1999; Lang Eight L. 2003):

- Involvement in a highly risky sexual behavior such as «unprotected sex, premature sex, choice of unhealthy sexual partners, having sex with many persons, bartering sex for food, money and other things».
- Use or misuse of harmful substances such as «smoking, drinking, drunk driving, drug addiction» (Champion Eight L. 2004; Jeokis, Sheen, Garci Moreno 2002; Raj, Silverman, and Amaro 2000)

Such destructive could have been avoided just by a piece of cloth put on the head and modest costumes that do not reveal woman»s

charms. Islam does protect women by ordering them to do so. Islam orders men to be modest and chaste and orders women not to be a source of temptation. It is ridiculous and illogical to think that women can protect themselves by wearing tight clothes and cut her hair in attractive ways that make them look more beautiful and attractive. The Bible and Talmud consider uncovered hair a source of temptation. In her study of the history of hijab in Jewish societies, Professor Bruner indicates that

«The Bible depicts hair as an ornament that makes woman more beautiful. It expresses the attractiveness of woman's hair in a poetic manner in the Song of Songs: Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. (6:5) Talmud considers woman's hair not only beautiful but also sexy and therefore it should be covered.»⁽¹⁸⁾

Such sexiness and attraction can be at times reasons for destructive effects when they attract the attention of attackers and give them the hope to get what they do not have right to. For all these reasons, Islam requests women to wear hijab and modest clothes to cover her charms in order to protect her. This has never been to subjugate or oppress her as in the Christian perspective.

18 Dr. Leila Leah Bronner, «From veil to wig: Jewish women's hair covering», From: Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought. 91993/22/.



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